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ABSTRACT

This paper shows how satellite television programs can be used to advance Asian students' listening ability in English. Particular focus is on news broadcasts. The paper is divided into three sections, an introduction, some concluding remarks, and the substantive discussion headed "Using News Broadcasts in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Classroom." The discussion answers the following questions: (1) What are the advantages of using the news for language learning?, (2) What can students do to become better news listeners?, (3) What kinds of stories should I choose?, (4) How can I teach a videotaped news broadcast?, and (5) Can I use other news and information programs? It is concluded that if teachers help students to learn effective ways of using language to get information or to do the things they find interesting, they will continue to learn and to enjoy learning long after they leave their classrooms. (AB)

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WORLD SERVICE TELEVISION: ELT RESOURCE FOR ASIA

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INTRODUCTION

Technology has brought us wonders that our grandparents could not even imagine and will bring to us in our lifetimes what we cannot even conceive of today. Thanks to a few astronauts who got out of their spacecraft, grabbed a satellite and repaired it, more people were able to watch the 1992 Summer Olympics live on their televisions. While the latest technological advances may not have reached those areas where basic human needs are still difficult to meet, we in Asia's Little Dragons (Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore), along with Japan and a few more future little dragons, have shops bulging with audiovisual equipment, from locally produced Nationals (Taiwan) to Korean Gold Stars to all the latest Japanese brands and models. Along with these come dishes and tuners that enable us to watch programs primarily in English, Japanese, and Chinese from Japanese and Hong Kong satellites.

In the past three years, since its legalization, the spread of satellite TV in Tai in has been exceedingly rapid. More and more homes are welcoming foreign cultures, foreign ideas, and foreign languages into their living rooms. Since 1989 we have

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been able to watch NHK--Japan's two public television stations that broadcast by satellite. BS1 offers news and sports; BS2 offers entertainment, music, and drama. Many of the programs are of rather high quality; these include those produced in Japan, foreign programming, and, increasingly, joint productions of NHK and another country. Many broadcasts are bilingual, so there is ample opportunity to listen to English, which is a required school subject in junior and senior high school and at the university in both Japan and Taiwan, and to Japanese, which is also studied widely in Taiwan. News broadcasts and movies are also shown in other languages (French, Russian, Chinese, etc.), with either a bilingual option in Japanese (e.g. news broadcasts, some dramas) or with Japanese subtitles (movies).

Since 1991, STAR-TV has been broadcasting from Hong Kong and can be viewed over most of Asia where it is not jammed or illegal; it has five channels, four of which broadcast in English (BBC World Service, Star Plus--entertainment, Prime Sports, and MTV), one in Mandarin (Chinese Channel), with a Cantonese Channel planned for the future. This dish and tuner also enable us to view by accident two stations in Mandarin from Mainland China and one in Mongolian from Mongolia. In December 1991, a Hong Kong newspaper reported that Taiwan led Asia in the number of households which had already installed dishes to watch Hong Kong's Star-TV stations.

Teachers of EFL and their learners in non-English speaking regions face the problem of getting adequate input in English that is also interesting, authentic, and at a level the students

can handle with teacher guidance. The development and availability of satellite television is a potential boon for language learners; we now have ample, up-to-date material for listening comprehension practice. Unfortunately, many Chinese learners of English reject the use of authentic language for self study in the mistaken belief that because they do not understand everything after one viewing, the material is too difficult for them. Yet with a little training, students can be taught to move beyond the passive viewing they often do in their native language and to become actively involved in decoding and processing the incoming foreign language information.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to show how satellite TV programs, news broadcasts from BBC World Service Television in particular, can be used to advance Asian students' listening ability in English. Although I will concentrate on news broadcasts here, other types of programming, such as short dramas, music videos, and even cartoons can also be used and similar techniques applied.

USING NEWS BROADCASTS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

As a teacher of English as a foreign language on the island of Taiwan, I relish the opportunities I get from satellite TV to practice my listening and get information in another language. From NHK's BS1 on weekday mornings I can watch from 15 to 25 minutes of last evening's news in German (Heute, ZDF 3-sat), French (Le Journal, A-2), Spanish (Telediario), Russian (Novosti, Channel 1); later in the day there is also news from Mainland

China, Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines (English). Further English broadcasts include CNN, BBC, ITV, ABC. All are broadcast bilingually in the original language and in Japanese. Other language broadcasts may be included if that region is in the news at the time. Of course, NHK also offers news broadcasts from Japan, some bilingual in Japanese and English. For all of these it must be remembered, however, that NHK chooses which news broadcasts to show, when to show them, and which stories in the broadcast to include or delete. Thus our choices are not completely free.

STAR-TV has its own news station, BBC World Service Television, with news on the hour practically every hour, from brief 5-minute summaries to its usual full 20-25 minute reports. These are, of course, completely in English with no subtitles.

Local Taiwan stations now show excerpts of American news broadcasts. TTV started this trend in 1989 by including the first ten or more minutes of CNN News in English with only main idea Chinese subtitles in its morning news program; in later news broadcasts during that day it uses that same footage with Chinese voice over. Then in early 1992 both CTV and CTS started including the first approximately 10 minutes from the CBS and ABC Evening News respectively in their morning news programs, which each then broadcasts in full minus commercials with complete Chinese subtitles later the same morning. CTV has also recently added a five-minute English language lesson immediately after and based on the CBS Evening News excerpt. Thus students do not need to have access to satellite TV to watch the news in English.

My own experience in watching foreign language news

broadcasts has prompted me to apply my experience to the needs of my students. Often they ask me, "How can I improve my English?" meaning on their own time. We have a wonderful English language resource available every day in living rooms and school dormitory recreation rooms, so why not put it to use?

Students are often afraid of authentic broadcasts. They see many English movies and TV shows in Taiwan, but these are all subtitled, even for bilingual broadcasts. Students do read the subtitles: When viewing a non-subtitled episode of The Cosby Show, one bewildered student asked "Where's the Chinese?" At higher levels of language ability, dependence on subtitles should be strongly discouraged. Instead of focusing on the printed lines, students can be taught to find clues to meaning from the visual context and their own knowledge of the world.

What are the advantages of using the news for language learning?

News broadcasts consist of many stories, each of which are relatively short and complete in themselves. Language teachers who have worked extensively with video (e.g. Stempleski & Tomalin, 1990) advise using short segments (one to three minutes) for several specific language tasks rather than longer segments with vague goals. Thus the availability of many short segments enables us to choose one or two of these stories that may be most appropriate to the class's interests and abilities.

Perhaps most important, the language is authentic. While authentic language may present some difficulties for beginners,

once a foundation is laid, such as with the six years of English in junior and senior high school that Taiwan's students get, they have the potential for understanding TV news. Although they complain about the speed, we must remind them that the newscasters are not speaking too rapidly, but that our students are listening too slowly. They must move away from the artificial slowness of some language learning tapes.

One very important feature of news broadcasts is that the TV anchors have clear and accurate pronunciation; furthermore, when we are watching the speaker's face, we find comprehension less difficult than we do when we only listen to the voice of the reporter in the field. Moreover, their grammar is correct, and they use the vocabulary and style of educated people. That is, newspeople tend to speak standard, socially acceptable varieties. Though students in Taiwan are trained in the American variety and complain about having to listen to British English, they nevertheless need to be able to comprehend it for future use. For this purpose, the BBC World Service and ITN are ideal. News programs in addition give us exposure to many varieties of language, such as as when South Africa's President F.W. de Klerk or Mr. Nelson Mandela or India's Prime Minister Rao are interviewed. We may hear many different geographical or nonstandard forms when the man in the street is asked his opinion. More and more often we hear nonnative speakers, such as Albania's President Berisha, using English as a lingua franca in world politics, economics, science, and many other fields. Our students will also need to utilize English in many situations in their future professions. They, as nonnative speakers, will have

ample opportunity to use English with other nonnative speakers they come into contact with professionally and personally. Even the less well-educated taxi drivers and McDonald's clerks have contacts with foreign visitors in English.

There is another advantage to using BBC World Service News broadcasts: the newswriters seem to be sensitive to having foreign and nonnative speaking listeners. They often add information to help us remember context, such as "George Bush, the American president,..." They show maps to help us locate the area in the world, such as a map of Asia with Cambodia pointed out. The name of the location is usually printed at the bottom of the screen when we hear the report from the scene. Names of famous or important people or experts being interviewed also appear on the screen. All these little extras help facilitate understanding. Though all news stations use these techniques, BBC World Service News seems to apply them more consistently.

What can students do to become better news listeners?

To understand TV news, students need to expand their vocabulary, particularly in the areas of politics and economics (other types of programming may have their own jargon, such as sports). There are some useful tricks here. First, students should be in the habit of reading the newspaper or listening to the news in their native language to become familiar with the issues. That is, they need context. Most issues develop over several days, months, or even years. Understanding all the words will not help them very much if they have nothing to relate the

information to, no framework in which to place it. Reading teachers talk about the importance of context; we can say the same for listening.

For specific vocabulary, students can read a newspaper in English so that they can see the words they are hearing and look them up in a dictionary if necessary. Reading may later help them to recognize the words when they hear them in the context of a similar news story. That is, once they learn the names of the main players and places and the necessary new vocabulary (e.g. refugee, famine, ceasefire, convoy), they should be able to continue to follow the story day by day on their own.

What kinds of stories should I choose?

I prefer to choose international stories because the students are more likely to have the context; the story is more likely to have appeared in the local newspapers or on local TV. Most of these are on-going stories--the Middle East issues, famine in Africa, war in the former Yugoslavia, Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong, and so on. Because of this, I prefer the BBC World Service because it gives stories primarily of international interest along with some main happenings in Asia. Although I have also heard the same of ITN, we receive it too seldom for me to judge or even use it.

American news programs are available regularly in Taiwan either through Taiwan's three TV stations or from NHK. CNN (except for the International Hour), CBS, ABC--serve primarily an American audience and so contain many stories of more local

American events not particularly of interest to foreign audiences; therefore, as mentioned before, students probably do not have the background or context for understanding the story. The same can be said for regular BBC News; what interests the British domestic audience, e.g. a nurses strike in one city, is of little interest to us on the other side of the world. Furthermore, the intricacies of local American politics may be difficult to comprehend even for native speakers of English in Britain, and vice versa.

A teacher can still use stories from these broadcasts if she chooses the political stories that are newsworthy, such as those relating to the American presidential election or US treatment of Haitian boat people, those of human interest (including those with good outcomes, not only disasters and accidents), or those that will serve to introduce a topic that wil be followed-up with other activities (e.g., a sexual harrassment suit in the US used as a lead-in to a reading or discussion or debate on whether there is sexual harrassment in Taiwan).

How can I teach a videotaped news broadcast?

The major problem with news listening is that it's gone too quickly, spoken once and gone, unlike the newspaper, which we can go over again and again and even check our dictionaries for hard words. There is a solution, however--the VCR. Viewing a second and third time often reveals more of the message to us. Students can be encouraged to do this on their own time if we have such facilities in our language labs, or if they have VCRs at home, as

many Taiwan homes do.

In our classrooms there are various activities we can use to train students to be less passive viewers. We can watch a news story first without sound and try to predict the content. This will show us just how much of the message does come from the visual. There may even be maps or diagrams, and the location and interviewee's name may appear at the bottom of the screen. These kinds of exercises illustrate very clearly how so much of any message comes from the visual portion. Students can also discover that their English ability is not the only factor that determines how much they understand.

We can pay attention to the structure of news reports. Usually the anchorperson summarizes the story in a few sentences, then we hear a reporter from the field giving more details and we are shown the actual scenes of the event, perhaps interspersed with quotes or comments by important people or ordinary citizens. Being aware of the general structure helps us to know what to expect next. This is the pattern most English language broadcasts use; it may not reflect the structure of news broadcasts from other cultures.

We can listen for the answers to the basic questions of Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? If we can answer those, we have got the main idea. We can also ask students to listen for a few specific words in a one-minute story and write down as much of the context of that word as they remember; for example, each row can listen for a different word. In this way, students are paying close attention to all the words as they search for their

own particular word. As Stempleski and Tomalin (1990) point out, when students have to search for one bit of information, they tend to listen very attentively to the whole in the process of searching for that bit, whereas if they have no task at all, they listen quite superficially to the whole.

We can prepare a cloze by presenting the text with blanks and having students fill them in as they listen; they can also share their guesses with their classmates to decide which fits better (here they must consider if the word fits semantically as well as grammatically). Facilities permitting, students could even transcribe one complete news story. Once a student reaches that stage, she can use her own VCR at home and work with whatever material interests her.

Can I use other news and information programs?

BBC World Service Television broadcasts a variety of other programs, from in-depth news analyses to travel shows to cooking shows. Science and technology, social issues, politics, the environment, pop culture--all and more are offered. These tend to run from 25 to 55 minutes long. Some of the more popular series, such as The Ascent of Man and The Story of English, can also be purchased. Perhaps here the teacher can record one episode and experiment with how she would use it before purchasing the series.

Can an EFL teacher use any of these broadcasts? First, consider the length of the program. For all of us, our attention spans are shorter in language that are not native to us.

Generally, the longer the piece you use, the more preparation you need to do. Stick to the three-minute maximum at first. For starters, World News Week offers more in-depth analyses, historical background, and explanations of the week's main news stories; you might consider using one of these instead of a regular news story or as a follow-up. Stories from other news analysis programs, such as 60 Minutes, 20/20, Inside Edition, 60 Minutes (Australia), 40 Minutes (Britain), could also be used.

Earthfile reports on the environment tend to be no more than ten minutes long. Other programs, such as UN World, which shows the progress of various UN projects throughout the world, consist of distinct segments, so we could choose just one segment. For example, a segment on the destruction of the rain forest could lead into a discussion activity on an individual's or a government's responsibility for preserving the natural environment or a debate on economic progress versus environmental protection.

For ten-minute segments and certainly for longer ones, the teacher should at least prepare some previewing questions to prepare the students for what they will see. For example, I have successfully used an interview by Terry Wogan with the singer Madonna. First, though, I prepared thirteen multiple choice questions for students to answer before they saw the interview. These were questions Mr. Wogan asked Madonna; students had to guess how she would answer. In this way, the students knew what some of the questions would be and wanted to see if they answered correctly. They were interested; they had something to listen for. In addition, our students (mostly female) were more

interested in listening to an interview with a famous, relatively young female singer that they would be listening to an interview with an old, male politician. We also followed up with an activity using one of Madonna's music videos.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Video material is, of course, copyrighted. These laws become complicated when a program copyrighted in one country is broadcast on another country's satellite TV service (legally or illegally) and viewed in third countries. The laws are still somewhat unclear from country to country. They are also unclear with regard to educational use. Organizations of English teachers such as TESOL and IATEFL are trying to get these regulations defined specifically for responsible educational use. When we consider its wonderful potential as a teaching and learning resource, we can say there are still far too few teachers using satellite TV at this time for educational purposes, particularly for English language teaching outside English speaking countries.

In Europe you are no more than a few hours' drive to another country; interaction is frequent. European cultures also have much in common. In Asia it's not so simple. Beyond geographical distance, the cultures are also more distant from western cultures. Yet we can still use TV as an extra input, a way to learn about cultures and practice language skills.

The language and culture represented on TV is in many ways more like real life that that shown in our language textbooks--

people with their idiolects, with food in their mouths, the clear speakers and the mumblers, with the background noise, the cues from gestures, facial expressions, even posture and clothing. Only the televisions in our living rooms cannot talk back to us--yet.

The news is just that--new, so it is intrinsically interesting and it also exposes us to many varieties of language. Furthermore, university students should know what is happening around them. As educated people, they need to begin thinking as citizens also of the world. Using the resources of satellite TV to help students become better news viewers gives them a way to expand their English skills and learn something useful at the same time.

Moreover, language does not exist of itself. The primary use of language, second and foreign languages included, is not to do language. It is to do so many other things, and more and more to access information. We do our students a disservice if we think we teach just language skills, particularly beyond the beginning levels. If instead we help students learn effective ways of using their language skills to get information or to do the things that they find useful or interesting, they will continue learning and enjoying learning long after they leave our classrooms.

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